

## **POODLE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

### **1. THE STUDY AREA - 142,050 acres**

The Poodle Mountain WSA (NV-020-012) is located in central Washoe County, approximately 15 miles northwest of Gerlach, Nevada. Reno, Nevada is about a 2-hour drive away. The WSA includes 142,050 acres of public lands and surrounds 3,226 acres of private land and 480 acres of split estate (private surface-public minerals) ).

The WSA boundary is bordered by roads (57.1 miles), private land (22.7 miles) and topographic features (2.5 miles). The study area is bordered on the southeast and south by the Sand Pass Road, on the southwest by the Smoke Creek Road leading into private land on the west, on the northwest by the North Fork Creek Road and portions of private land, on the north by the Buffalo Hills Reservoirs Road and a portion of private land and on the northeast by the road identified as State Highway 81 intermixed with parcels of private land and on the east by private land.

The Poodle Mountain WSA is generally circular, measuring between 4 and 21 miles north-south and between 3 and 18 miles east-west. It encompasses most of the Buffalo Hills, a circular shaped basaltic plateau dominated by large canyons generally radiating from the center. The elevations for the WSA range between 3,850 feet to 6,832 feet. There are three distinct landforms to be found: basalt plateau highlands, basalt plateau canyon country, and fringing desert piedmont.

The basalt plateau highlands are in the north-central and northwest part and are flat to rolling with a small area of alluvium. This section includes Poodle Mountain, the volcanic vent from which the Buffalo Hills basalt issued. The plateau highlands are only moderately eroded compared to the canyon country around them. The basalt plateau canyon country has numerous deeply-cut canyons and gorges. This section of the WSA includes finger-like, flat-topped ridges and remnant plateaus between the canyons. The landscape is extremely rugged, rocky and has high-relief as compared to the low-relief highland plateau from which it radiates. The fringing desert piedmont is along the south and southwestern boundary and is the transition between the Buffalo Hills and the Smoke Creek Desert to the south. The landscape is low-relief alluvium with low parallel ridges and drainages lying perpendicular to the basalt plateau.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE**

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 142,050 acres for uses other than wilderness.

This WSA is recommended for uses other than wilderness due to a compilation of factors which, individually might not cause the study area to be unsuitable for wilderness designation, but collectively, create a situation where the recommendation is for no wilderness. There is an extensive and expansive amount of private land. Three thousand seven hundred and six acres of private land are spread throughout the WSA. This acreage would be of minimal significance if it were clustered together but it is spread out through 38 different parcels. These pieces of private land control the available water. The owner has the right of reasonable access to these parcels at any time. It would be impossible to manage for wilderness values.

There are a large number of range improvements in the WSA and they are widely scattered. Each of these improvements would be allowed under the wilderness management policy. This would require that vehicle access be allowed for the maintenance of these projects. The country is such that vehicular access for this maintenance would keep cherrystem roads and ways in existence and this would lower the natural quality of the area.

Another manageability problem concerns the 1,400 acres of mining claims present. It is projected that 65 acres of them will be developed. The audio and visual intrusions caused by the development of any of these acres would reduce the wilderness characteristics of the immediate area. These developments would include, but not be limited to, noise caused by engines and the normal day to day operation of a mining enterprise. Dust, buildings, vehicles and diggings would lessen the wilderness experience. Since the BLM is required to provide reasonable access to individuals with valid, preFLPMA mining claims, construction of access roads through the area would be an additional erosion of wilderness values.

In summary, while the individual manageability concerns of each of these issues would not be of sufficient cause to recommend this WSA for nonwilderness, the aggregate of all of these concerns does. Therefore, this WSA is not recommended for wilderness.

### **3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**A. Naturalness:** The WSA is considered to be primarily natural. The Poodle Mountain WSA encompasses most of the Buffalo Hills, a circular shaped basaltic plateau dominated by large canyons generally radiating from the center. There are three distinct landforms to be found: basalt plateau highlands, basalt plateau canyon country, and fringing desert piedmont.

The basalt plateau highlands include Poodle Mountain, the volcanic vent from which the Buffalo Hills basalt issued. This area is only moderately eroded compared to the canyon country around them. The basalt plateau canyon country has numerous deeply-cut canyons and gorges. This section of the WSA includes finger-like, flat-topped ridges and remnant plateaus between the canyons. The fringing desert piedmont is low-relief alluvium with low parallel ridges and drainages lying perpendicular to the basalt plateau.

There are a number of range improvements present. They include 14 developed springs, 23 reservoirs, six fences for a total of 27.15 miles, a pipeline 0.5 mile long, one water trough, two corrals and one study plot. There are 63 ways totaling 76.9 miles. Five stream channels along the southern boundary road were contoured to reduce the impacts of floods. The contouring extends up to 0.25 mile within the WSAs. This road also has three borrow pits just outside the study area boundary. Abandoned and active ranches are near the WSA boundaries and are visible from portions of the unit. A highway and a major county road, usually sustaining light traffic, are the east and southeast boundaries.

**B. Solitude:** Opportunities for solitude are considered outstanding. The basalt plateau highlands offer fair to good local vegetative screening from scattered stands of juniper and fair topographic screening because of the rolling landform. The basalt plateau canyons also offer fair to good vegetative screening due to the juniper, but the deep canyons, many of them meandering, offer excellent topographic screening. In the fringing desert piedmont, the low shrubs provide poor vegetative screening and the low relief provides fair to poor topographic screening.

The WSA is the proper size and shape to provide outstanding solitude, even though the road from the north boundary to the center of the unit detracts from the solitude. Two military training routes over the WSA have flights at 500 feet and below.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** The WSA's size and topography create outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation such as day-hiking, camping, backpacking, horse-packing, rock climbing and scrambling and nature study. Attractions that might bring people to this area include Nobles wagon route (a California emigrant trail used during the mid-1800s), the Poodle Mountain volcanic center and many impressive canyons. Mountain lions, antelope, deer and sage grouse offer opportunities for hunters. The WSA is also part of the Buffalo Hills Herd Use Area for wild horses.

**D. Special Features:** There are no special features in the WSA.

## **5. MANAGEABILITY**

The study area is considered to be unmanageable because of the 3,706 acres of private lands spread through out it. This acreage would not be as significant if it were concentrated in one parcel. However, it is spread through out 38 different parcels. These areas control the available water. The owner has the right to develop any of these parcels at any time he desires and reasonable access across public lands has to be granted to him. If all the private parcels were to be developed, a network of roads would spread through the WSA. Access to the 1,400 acres of mining claims would have to be guaranteed. For these reasons, this study area is considered to be unmanageable. There are also management concerns regarding the 76.9 miles of ways and the easy accessibility for ORVs (44,000 acres or 31 percent of WSA).

## **5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES**

The following conclusions were reached: 28,300 acres with moderate metallic mineral potential (mercury, uranium, tungsten and silver); 20,000 acres with high nonmetallic mineral potential (sand and gravel); 122,000 acres with moderate nonmetallic mineral potential (decorative stone, red cinder aggregate) and 24,000 acres with moderate geothermal potential. There are approximately 1,400 acres of mining claims in the WSA. There is no present production of any mineral or geothermal resources in the study area.

In summary, quantities of various mineral and energy resources are unknown, but the potential for occurrence is from moderate to high in portions of the WSA.

## **6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

During the initial and intensive inventory stages (1978-1980), many of the sixteen comments discussed characteristics of the area (e.g., intrusions, resources, wilderness qualities) or suggested boundary changes. Reasons given for supporting WSA status included opportunities for solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation and naturalness. Reasons given for opposing WSA status included other resource values, roads, intrusions and lack of opportunities for solitude or recreation. These comments addressed the entire 162,560 acres of the original study area. About 20,000 acres have since been removed from wilderness consideration.

During the 90-day comment period for the Draft Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement, three formal public hearings were held in Nevada (Gerlach on November 1, Winnemucca on November 3 and Reno on November 8, 1983). Only one oral comment was received that named this WSA and that person agreed with the Proposed Action in the draft EIS (No Wilderness). Of the 74 written comments, 64 of them supported more wilderness than the Proposed Action and 10 of them supported the Proposed Action. Comments discussed roads and other human imprints and the private property inside the WSA as well as the need for hunter access into the area and the lack of solitude. Other people wrote about the need to preserve the wildlife, the traces of the 19th century Nobles Trail, the desirability of the scenery and wild horse viewing opportunities. The WSA's proximity to Reno was also discussed.

The Governor of the State of Nevada concurred with the Bureau's recommendation. No comments about wilderness were received from Washoe County agencies or officials. The U.S. Air Force supports wilderness designation provided no restrictions are placed on military flights. It has said that it will work with the BLM if military flights create problems in some areas. No comments were received on the final EIS.